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DON'T EVER REFER TO JESUS CHRIST AS OUR ELDER BROTHER

Have you ever attended a Church of God church service where the man giving the opening prayer or the closing prayer used the expression "our Elder Brother" in reference to Jesus Christ? Or perhaps this expression "our Elder Brother" was used in a prayer at a Bible Study? Or perhaps someone even used this expression in casual conversation? Or have you heard this expression so often that now it doesn't even make an impression on you?

Anyway, if you have ever heard someone use this expression "our Elder Brother" in any context, how did that make you feel? Did it make you feel good? Were you impressed? Did you silently nod and agree with that sentiment? Did you feel honored? Did you feel it was an expression of deep respect for the Creator God to refer to Him as "our Elder Brother"?

Or **did it make you cringe**, with "cringe" here meaning "to shrink away in fear"? That is the effect the use of this expression has on me. When I hear someone use this expression, I cringe! That is the way it already affected me the very first time I ever heard someone use that expression. It just sounded plain wrong. Why?

Because that expression is just so insulting and so blasphemous towards Jesus Christ!

And if you yourself have ever used this expression I urge you to repent (i.e. to change your way of thinking) and to fervently ask God for forgiveness for your insulting references to Jesus Christ!

Just who do the people who use this expression think they are?

The answer here is: today most of them are just **dumb sheep**, who without ever using their own minds blindly follow a perverse and diabolical example set for them by someone else.

Before we look at what the Bible tells us in this regard, let's go back and see how this diabolical expression was introduced to the people in the Church of God. [Comment: I expressly use the word "diabolical" here with its meaning of "originating with the devil".]

HOW THIS EXPRESSION GOT STARTED

It shouldn't really be this way. But going back a few decades there were unfortunately some men who used to look upon the opportunity to open or close in prayer as a way of getting noticed by the pastor. Or, if they were ministers already, they would use opening and closing prayers to try to make an impression on the congregation.

Back in the 1960s I once stood through an evangelist giving a 5+ minute closing prayer at the end of the Last Great Day, when he himself had not been a speaker on that Holy Day. His closing prayer was a condensed sermon about the significance of the Last Great Day. It seemed that he felt the message hadn't been delivered adequately by the other two evangelists who had spoken that day, and so he provided the missing information. Or was he just too important to not have spoken on the Last Great Day?

This approach of trying to impress with a closing prayer is not so much of a problem any more today. Today most of the men who are called upon to open or close in prayer are just concerned about fulfilling this responsibility without getting stuck and without looking clumsy or uncomfortable. They are happy when they get through that occasion without becoming too self-conscious. And they all develop a set of stock phrases and expressions.

One way to try to impress people back then was for ministers and for "leading men" to **introduce something novel** into both their speaking and their prayers, something that would be noticed by the members of the congregation.

I also recall a sermonette given by a prominent minister back in the 1960s before Mr. Herbert Armstrong then gave the sermon. This minister used Romans 8:15 to try to explain the meaning of the word "abba". Here is that verse.

For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby **we cry**, **Abba, Father**. (Romans 8:15)

And this minister's point was that "abba" is an affectionate term that supposedly means "**daddy**". He tried to make the point that in our prayers we should be addressing God as "Daddy". Thankfully Mr. Armstrong happened to be in attendance that day to give the sermon. And the idea that we should address God as "Daddy" was shot down in flames ... and was never mentioned again by anyone.

Now that wasn't an opening or closing prayer. But my point here is: back then we occasionally had some pretty strange ideas put forward by certain men. [As a matter of interest, the man who gave that sermonette later stayed with Worldwide and accepted all the changes that were then introduced. He rejected obedience to all of God's laws, which obedience he himself had decades earlier taught to the people in God's Church. When he died, he was no longer keeping God's Sabbath and many other laws of God.]

Let's also keep in mind that in life someone can **set a good example 1000 times** (that's once a week for 20 years), and in many cases hardly anyone will follow that good example. Good examples are simply not emulated very often. But someone can **set a bad example one single time**, and, unless that bad example is immediately censured very firmly, almost always there will be some fools who will copy that bad example. They are fools because they don't think everything through for themselves. They simply copy the bad example without thinking of consequences. This has happened many times, not just in the Church, but also in life in general.

So now to the expression "our Elder Brother".

Back in the early 1980s **some idiot minister**, who later left God's Church, gave a closing prayer at a church service, and he used the expression "**our Elder Brother**" in reference to Jesus Christ. The man was an idiot, because he had no spiritual discernment at all, none whatsoever. But nobody had ever heard that expression before. And many people were impressed.

It took some time, but eventually **other people in other congregations would use this expression** in their prayers at church services. To them that expression sounded so good. When questioned, the reasoning that was presented was based on Romans 8:29. There Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is "**the firstborn among many brethren**". And since the converted members of God's Church are going to be those "many brethren", therefore Jesus Christ must be "our Elder Brother". That's pretty logical reasoning, isn't it? **Like hell it is!**

The use of this expression "our Elder Brother" was never censured. It should also have been shot down

in flames. But that never happened. And so in time this expression was accepted by various people in different congregations. In many congregations you might never hear this expression, and in other congregations you can count on this expression being used whenever certain men are called upon to lead in prayers. In this latter situation "our Elder Brother" has become one of their stock expressions.

So fast-forward to our time today.

In certain groups or congregations this expression has now been used so long and so often, that nobody even thinks about what this expression is actually saying. We don't question things we have heard for decades.

So let's examine what this expression is actually saying.

WHO DOES THIS EXPRESSION HONOR?

When you and I first meet, and I tell you that the Governor of Texas or New York or Kentucky, etc. is "my older brother", who does this statement honor ... my older brother or me?

"He's my older brother" doesn't make my brother more important, does it? No, that statement makes me more important, compared to if my brother was not the Governor of some state.

The pronoun "my" (or the plural "our") in this context is focused on **showing off my** (or "our") **good connections**. It makes me more important. It elevates my status. Perhaps someone might even offer me a bribe just for introducing them to my Governor-brother? I mean, these things do happen, right?

In plain language: identifying ourselves with someone in a position of power elevates us ourselves, and not the person in that position of power. And so the expression "our Elder Brother" sounds good to us because **this expression elevates us** to a higher status. It is aimed at making us feel good about ourselves.

But that is the last possible attitude we should ever have when we in prayer approach the Almighty God in heaven ... feeling good about ourselves.

Attaching the expression "our Elder Brother" to our prayers means that **we are praying just like the Pharisee** in Luke 18:11-12 ... we are blowing our own horn! We are elevating ourselves!

In that context Jesus Christ said:

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for **every one that exalts himself shall be abased**; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:14)

The bottom line here is that God does not listen to the prayers of people who speak about "our Elder Brother". That is simply not an expression that God accepts or recognizes. **Is that clear?!** And God does not listen to the prayers of people who exalt themselves.

The expression "our Elder Brother" is most certainly not an expression of humility. And neither is it an expression of respect for Jesus Christ!

So coming back to our "idiot minister back in the 1980s", he clearly got his inspiration directly from Satan. You shouldn't have to be a genius to figure that one out.

If you have four siblings and you say "Bill is **our** elder brother" in reference to your brother Bill, then you could equally correctly have said "Bill is **my** elder brother". And likewise, when you say "Jesus Christ is **our** Elder Brother" you are also saying "Jesus Christ is **my** Elder Brother".

But Jesus Christ is not your Bro!!!

It would be extremely offensive (actually blasphemous) for you to refer to Jesus Christ as your "Bro". But **that is exactly what the "our Elder Brother" statement is doing** ... insulting Jesus Christ! The insult is simply using an on-the-surface seemingly less offensive term, that's all. But **the underlying sentiment is the same**. And using the plural pronoun "our" instead of the singular "my" doesn't change anything either.

THERE IS NO RECIPROCITY

There is an enormous difference between how Jesus Christ can refer to all those who submit their lives to God, and how Jesus Christ can address us on the one hand, and how we are to speak about Jesus Christ on the other hand.

The forms of address between these two parties are not interchangeable. So, for example, when Jesus Christ called His apostles "friends", that didn't entitle the apostles to begin referring to Jesus Christ as their "Friend".

You are My friends, if you do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knows not what his lord does: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you. (John 15:14-15)

So did those statements mean that from then onwards the apostles could refer to Jesus Christ as "my Friend Jesus Christ", or as "our Friend Jesus Christ"?

No, of course not! And none of them ever did! They all, without exception, continued to see themselves as "the bond-servants of Jesus Christ", meaning "the personal slaves of Jesus Christ".

Similarly, when Abraham was called "the friend of God" (see James 2:23), that didn't mean that Abraham from then onwards could speak about "my Friend the Eternal God". There is no reciprocity with the use of these terms, when we are dealing with the Almighty Creator God.

It is one thing for Jesus Christ to tell us: I don't view you as a servant. It is another thing altogether for us to conclude that therefore we are no longer the servants of Jesus Christ.

Let me state this very plainly:

If we in this life view our relationship with Jesus Christ in any way other than a Master-servant relationship, then we are heading for a major disaster.

What did Jesus Christ say a little earlier in the very same context (i.e. at His last Passover observance)?

You call Me **Master** and **Lord**: and **you say well**; for *so* I am. (John 13:13)

Did Jesus Christ say: you call Me "our Elder Brother" and you say well? No, absolutely not! Well, could it be that the people who use the "our Elder Brother" expression have never read John 13:13? No, that is

also impossible if they have kept at least one Passover. That is when this verse is always read. So how could they miss this plain instruction?

What did Jesus Christ mean with His statement "you say well" to the men He would a few minutes later call "friends"? Jesus Christ meant: that's right, **you should be calling Me "Master" and "Lord"!**

So Jesus Christ Himself tells us that we should be calling Him "Master" and "Lord"; but some people feel they can do better than that ... they can call Jesus Christ "our Elder Brother".

Notice what Jesus Christ said to His apostles in Matthew 23.

But be not you called Rabbi: for **one is your Master**, *even* Christ; and **all you are brethren**. (Matthew 23:8)

Neither be you called masters: for **one is your Master**, *even* Christ. (Matthew 23:10)

The word "master" identifies our relationship to Jesus Christ as that of being servants! That's what we are ... not "the brothers" of Jesus Christ, but "the servants" of Jesus Christ.

Notice that in verse 8 above Jesus Christ established a very clear distinction between Himself on the one hand, and all true Christians on the other hand. **All of us are "brethren"**, yes! And we can freely use this word to refer to all our fellow-members in God's Church.

But Jesus Christ Himself is distinct from that group. He is the Master, and we are the servants. And if Jesus Christ chooses to refer to us as "friends", that is an enormous honor and privilege, but **that does not change our status as "the servants of Jesus Christ"**, with Christ always remaining the undisputed Master. And until the resurrection we are not yet "the Bride of Jesus Christ".

We are not at all on the same level as Jesus Christ! So don't ever say anything about Jesus Christ that implies that we are on the same level with Him.

Now there were two men in the Church who could have legitimately used the expression "our Elder Brother". Let's take a look at what they said.

JAMES AND JUDE

You know that Abraham at one point said about his wife Sarah "she is my sister" (see Genesis 20:2). He said this because he feared for his life. Abraham later justified his statement somewhat by saying "and **yet indeed she is my sister**, she is the daughter of my father ..." (see Genesis 20:12). The point here is that when two people share only one parent, that still entitles them to refer to each other as brother or sister.

Now both James and Jude had the same mother as Jesus Christ. They could correctly be identified as Jesus Christ's "half-brothers". And these two men each wrote one book of the New Testament.

If anyone on earth could ever justifiably use the expression "our Elder Brother" it was James and Jude. It would have been a true statement for them. Or they could have done it very discreetly, still somehow letting us know that they had a closer relationship with Jesus Christ than any of us could claim.

Is that what they did? Is that how they addressed Jesus Christ or spoke about Jesus Christ ... as their

"Elder Brother"? Let's have a look, though I'm sure that you already know the answer here.

James, **a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. (James 1:1)

The Greek word translated as "servant" is "doulos" and it means "a slave". It refers to someone in a servile position. So James saw himself as a slave of his literal half-brother Jesus Christ. Notice also that James grouped Jesus Christ with God the Father, rather than grouping Jesus Christ with himself (which is what the expression "our Elder Brother" would have implied).

And for the record: the expression "the Lord Jesus Christ" also means "the Master Jesus Christ", since "master" is the basic meaning of the word "Lord". So James also addressed his half-brother as "Master". James clearly presents the Master-slave relationship in his opening statement.

And here is what Jude said.

Jude, **the servant** ("doulos") **of Jesus Christ**, and **brother of James**, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, *and* called: (Jude 1:1)

Jude was quite free in identifying himself as "the brother of James". But **Jude was not about to call himself "the brother of Jesus Christ"**! James was Jude's "older brother", and Jesus Christ was Jude's "older half-brother". But Jude did not dare to refer to Jesus Christ as his "older brother". No, it takes "an idiot minister" who would leave God's Church a few years later to be that presumptuous.

Can we recognize the clear distinction between these two statements that Jude made here ... slave to the One and brother to the other? Jude looked upon Jesus Christ as his Master. Jude did not in any way hint at "family" when he spoke about Jesus Christ.

This is important to understand!

When we say "our Elder Brother" **then we are grouping Jesus Christ with us human beings**! That is flat-out wrong! Jesus Christ, who has existed together with God the Father for all past eternity, must always be in the same group as God the Father. And all of us human beings are on a lower level. And we always need to be extremely respectful of the status and the position that belong to Jesus Christ. "Our Elder Brother" does not express any respect whatsoever. It is a presumptuous attempt at wanting to elevate ourselves to Jesus Christ's level.

Earlier I said that "our Elder Brother" is a diabolical expression. Here's why I said that.

It was Satan who first wanted to be a part of "a higher level". He had wanted to sit on God's throne and to be in God's position. That is mentioned in Isaiah 14:13-14. For that desire God punished Satan, and Satan's punishment will last for all future eternity.

But during this present age Satan is "the tempter" (1 Thessalonians 3:5). And he tempts us to desire all the things that he, Satan, himself desired. And the sentiment underlying the expression "our Elder Brother" is basically the same as Satan's original desire ... wanting to be on God's level. Now you probably didn't realize this ramification of the "our Elder Brother" expression. **But Satan certainly does!**

And like you, all of the angels under Satan's leadership probably (this is my guess) didn't initially realize just where all "the small changes" that Satan kept introducing to them were leading. By the time they realized that Satan was leading them towards rejecting God's authority over their lives it was too late. They had been hooked, and by then they had fully accepted Satan's selfish way of thinking and

reasoning.

Putting ourselves on the same level as Jesus Christ who has always existed, by thinking of Christ as "our Elder Brother", is a step in that direction. And it is a step away from seeing ourselves in a servile relationship towards Jesus Christ. It is a step in Satan’s direction. And Satan knows it!

Consider what Jesus Christ said at another occasion.

Then one said unto Him, Behold, Your mother and Your brethren stand without, desiring to speak with You. But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is My mother? and who are My brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold **My mother and My brethren**! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father who is in heaven, the same is **My brother, and sister, and mother**. (Matthew 12:47-50)

So if ladies who repent and obey God are Christ’s "mother", does that mean that those ladies can therefore refer to Jesus Christ as "their Son"? No, obviously not! That thought is absurd, right? But that line of reasoning would be completely logical if this situation involved anyone other than Jesus Christ (i.e. if it involved a mere mortal human being).

These statements in Matthew 12 should make clear what I said earlier, that there is no reciprocity with this type of statements. Irrespective of how Jesus Christ may choose to refer to us, honoring us in some way for our total commitment to God, we must always maintain our own perspective as being the servants of Jesus Christ.

We must stick with the principle of Luke 14:10.

But when you are invited, go and **sit down in the lowest room**; that when he that invited you comes, he may say unto you, **Friend, go up higher**: then shall you have honor in the presence of them that sit at meat with you. (Luke 14:10)

Don’t take a status for granted. Let God elevate us to a higher position. There’ll be 144,000 positions at the table. And we should all assume that our place is the very last place at the table. Let God then tell us, if that should turn out to be the case, "Friend, move up higher".

It is an attitude of not taking anything for granted. And the attitude of "our Elder Brother" does take things for granted ... especially when those who use this expression later leave God’s Church altogether, and stop living by the laws of God. It is a very presumptuous expression.

Okay, so where does that leave us?

MEN AND BRETHREN, WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Right, so our original "idiot minister in the 1980s" was nothing but a tare, who had been planted in God’s Church by Satan. And then some of us came along and naively copied the bad example this tare had set.

What Paul told the men of Athens in Acts 17 applies equally to our situation here.

I understand that the people in God’s Church who today use this expression "our Elder Brother" in reference to Jesus Christ are doing it ignorantly. They have never before thought this through. They

simply copied what they had heard someone else say. Their motive was not to elevate themselves or all of us in any way. Like the Apostle Paul, they did it ignorantly.

As Paul said about himself:

Who was before **a blasphemer**, and a persecutor, and injurious: but **I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly** in unbelief. (1 Timothy 1:13)

When we repent, then God "winks at the times of this ignorance" (see Acts 17:30), meaning that God will overlook our transgressions in this matter. But now God commands "all men every where to repent" (same verse), meaning that now, once we have access to true understanding, God requires us to change.

And for those people who have used this expression "our Elder Brother":

Now you have been warned. Now you are in a position to understand. From now on you don't have any excuse for ever using this expression again.

So cut it out! Don't use it! Don't say it! And especially, don't even think it!

And from now onwards whenever anyone else in your presence refers to Jesus Christ as "our Elder Brother", **then you too should cringe**! That expression needs to be totally eradicated from amongst the people of God.

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